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Division of Child and Family Services Report on Placement Stability and Delinquency

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June 2008

Introduction/Background

The information in this report is being provided to the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) State Quality Improvement (QI) Committee to assist in evaluating whether or not children entering care for delinquency versus other primary reasons have higher rates of placement instability (i.e., greater number of placements while in care) and whether different policies regarding how a case is worked, how placements are made, and what placements are utilized are needed. The following data may help facilitate discussion of this topic of delinquency and placement stability.

Methodology

Data utilized for this report were obtained from the DCFS case management system, SAFE. Data are entered in SAFE by DCFS employees to document client demographic and services information. This report uses data on foster children entering custody during the last three calendar years. The children were divided into two main groups, those entering foster care for reasons of delinquency versus those entering custody for other reasons. The delinquency group included children with cases entered into SAFE with a primary reason of delinquency, ungovernable or status offense. Only one case over the three-year review period was reported with a primary reason of ungovernable. Some data entry errors were found in the use of the primary reason status offense (A status offense is defined as "an act that would not be considered an offense if committed by an adult. These include age specific offenses such as running away from home, violating curfew, and truancy."¹). Some cases utilized this reason when the parent was arrested instead of for the actions of the child. However, these cases were a small percentage of the group and have minimal impact on the data results.

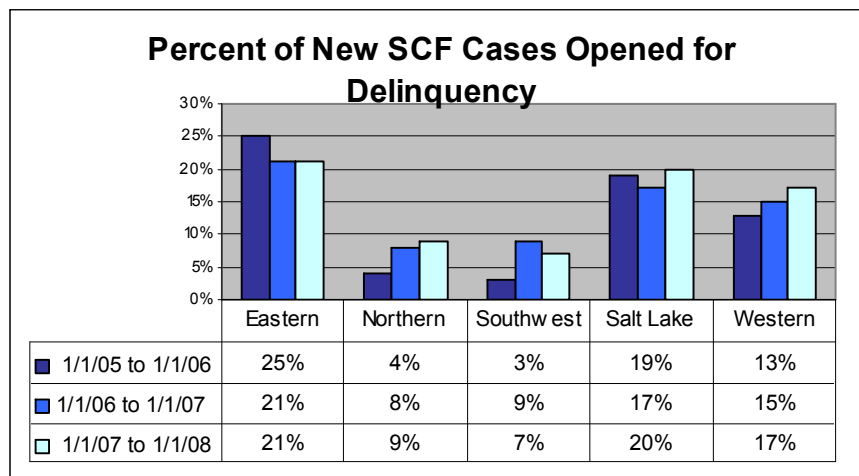
The second main group included children entering for reasons other than delinquency, ungovernable, and status offense. These reasons include abandonment, adoptive failure, dependency, neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, parental relinquishment, and parental condition. Because most children in the delinquent group were between the ages of 12 and 17, a subset of children aged 12 to 17 entering for these other reasons was included in some of the data charts to assist in determining if differences noted appeared to be due to the reasons children entered custody or if they were more due to the children's age.

Some of the data were compared by region to determine if there were differences by area of the State and/or regional practice. Comparisons by calendar year were also evaluated to determine whether differences remain consistent over time.

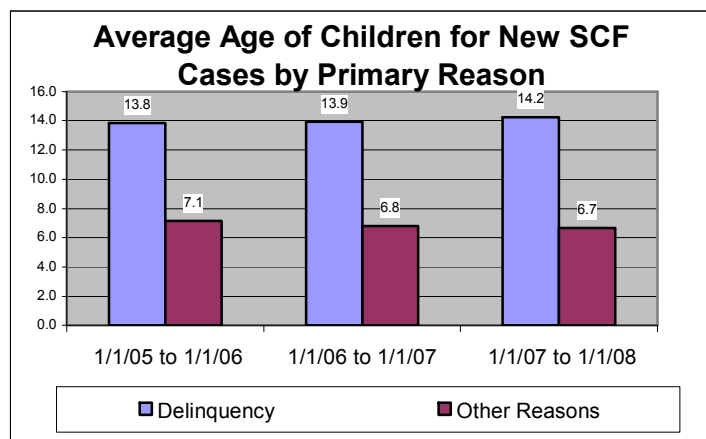
Results

The percent of children entering foster care for reasons of delinquency versus other primary reasons vary across regions. Disparities may be due to population differences,

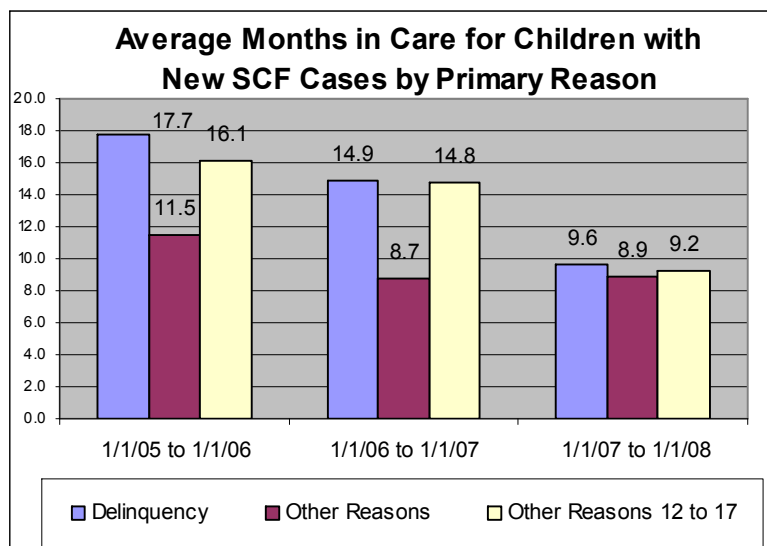
practices of individual judges, or lack of other resources in these areas to serve delinquent children. Statewide children entering foster care for reasons of delinquency ranged from 13% in Calendar Year 2005 to 15% in Calendar Year 2007. Eastern and Salt Lake Valley regions consistently have the highest percentages, ranging from 17% to 25%, whereas Northern and Southwest regions have the lowest percentages, ranging from 3% to 9%.² Western region's percentages of children entering custody for delinquency are close to the state rate. Overall the percentage of children entering for delinquency has increased approximately one percent a year for the past two years.



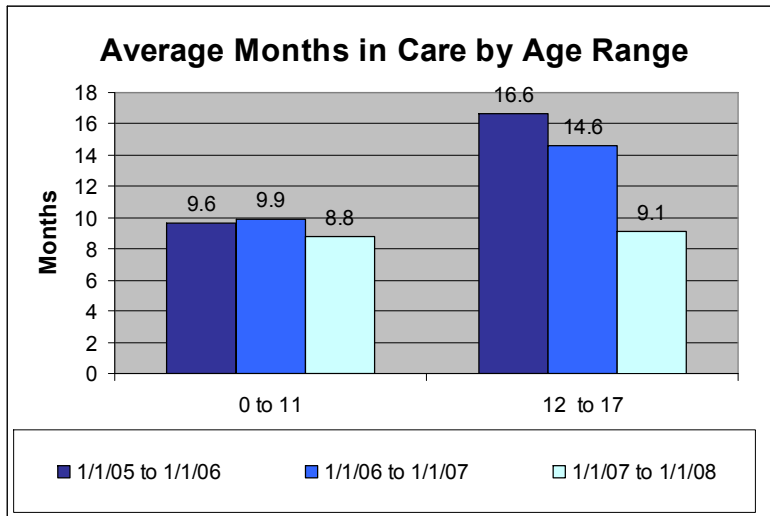
As expected, the average age of children entering foster care is different for the delinquency group versus the other group. The average age of children entering with a primary reason of delinquency is about 14 years as compared to 7 years of age for other reasons. This pattern has remained consistent over the last three years.³ With few exceptions, children entering custody for delinquency are typically between ages 12 and 17 years.



The chart below shows the average months in custody for children entering for delinquency, children entering for other reasons, and children entering for other reasons that are aged 12 to 17 years. The number of months in care is calculated from the custody start date to either the custody end date or, if still in custody, the current date. The reduction in average months in care across years is a reflection of the reduction in time each entry cohort has been tracked to date. Children entering custody in 2005 can be tracked for up to three years, whereas children entering care in 2007 have only been tracked approximately one year. For children in custody less than one year the difference between the two groups is minimal, however as more time goes by the discrepancy becomes more pronounced. Children entering care for delinquency stay in care longer on average than those entering for other reasons, however the age at which a child enters care appears to influence the length of stay more than the reason for DCFS custody.⁴

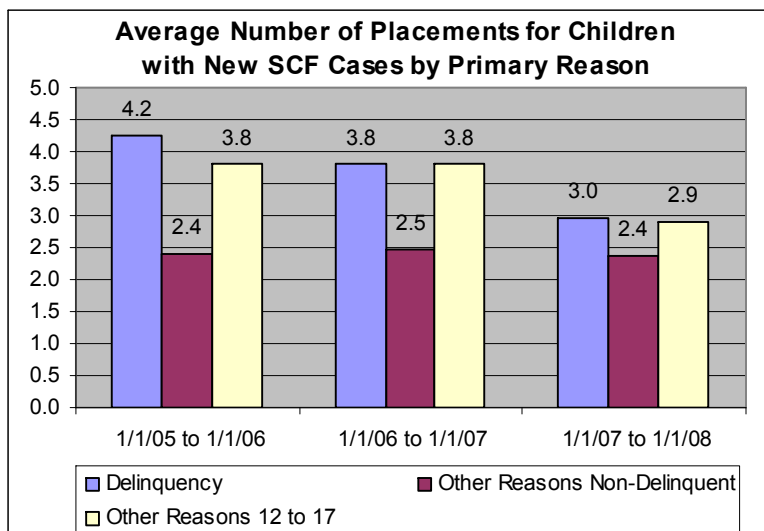


Age is known to be related to average months in care, with older children remaining in custody longer than younger children. In Utah's DCFS, a child entering care at ages 0 to 11 years spent an average of 9.4 months in care as compared to 13.4 months in care for children 12 to 17 years over the three-year period.⁵ Again, the discrepancy widens as the time children are tracked lengthens. Whereas younger children are in DCFS custody approximately 9 months on average, older children may remain in care several months longer.



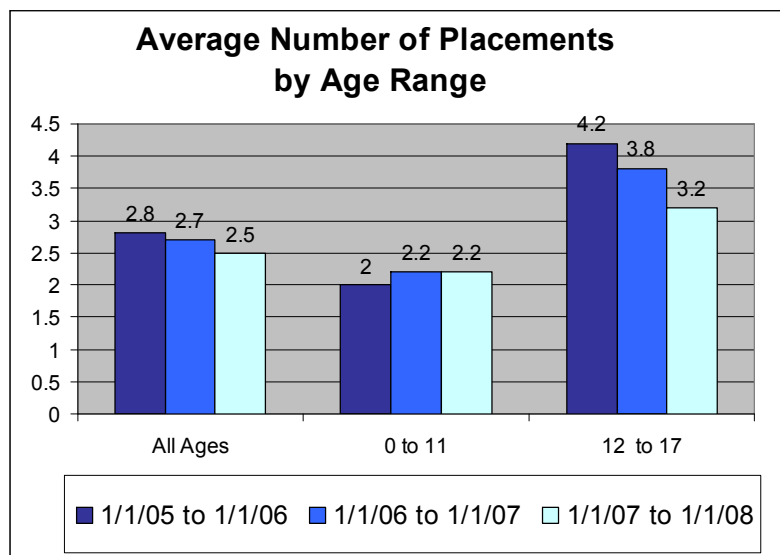
Between 32% and 34% of the children entering care are between 12 and 17 years old. About one third of these children enter for reasons of delinquency. These data are consistent over the three-year review period.⁶

The data below show the average number of placements the different groups have experienced while in custody. The average number of placements for children entering foster care for delinquency is higher than those for other reasons, however the number of placements appears to be more related to age than to reason for entering custody. The disparity widens as children are tracked for longer time periods which may indicate the discrepancy is accounted for by greater time in care.⁷

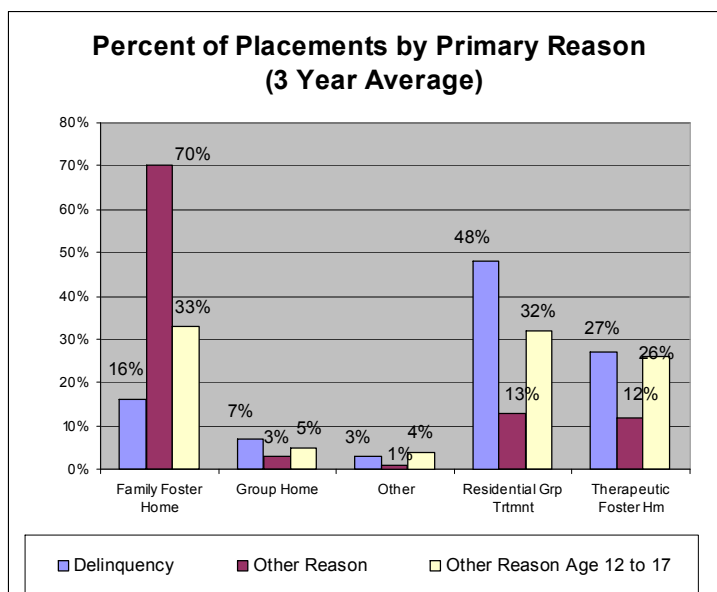


The chart below shows the difference in the number of placements between age groups across the time period.⁸ The differences between age groups may demonstrate that children who are older have a higher number of placements on average than children

who are younger, however this may also be a reflection of the greater length of time older children are in care. The longer children are in custody the more placements, on average, they have.

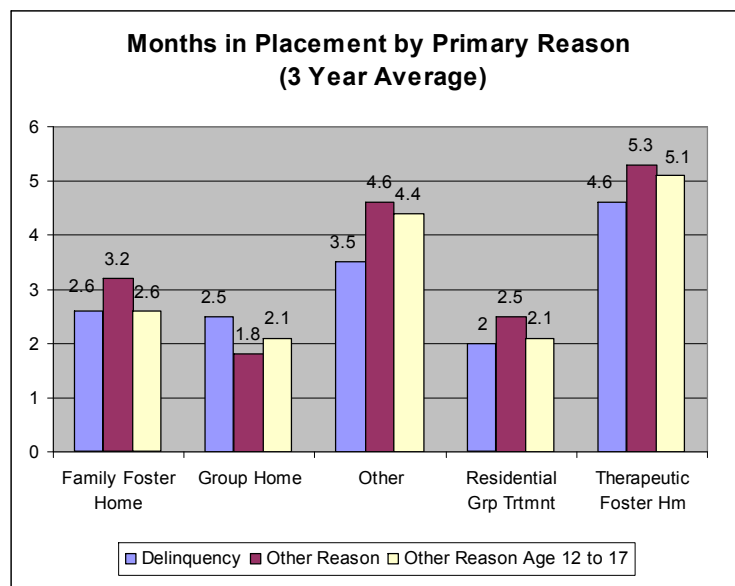


There appears to be a notable difference in the type of placements utilized and the primary reason of a case. Over the three-year review period between 47% to 50% of the placements for cases opened with a primary reason of delinquency used a residential group treatment placement setting and about 15% used family foster home. The chart also shows a comparable number of children aged 12 to 17 years who enter for other reasons by age. In contrast, between 66% to 75% of the placements for cases opened with other primary reasons are family foster home and about 13% use residential group treatment placements. These differences are consistent over the time period. The chart below represents a three-year average.⁹

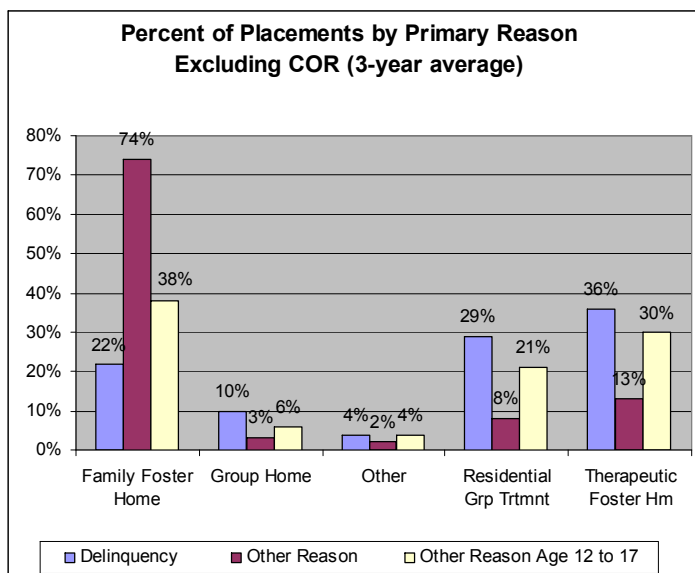


During the time period, of children who entered care for delinquency and were placed in a family foster placement, 43% were placed in a specialized foster care (SFP) setting. An average of 18% of those placements ended because the child ran away and 18% ended by request of the foster parent. For children who were placed in a residential group treatment placement type 55% were placed in a correction facility setting, the average length of these placements lasted just over two weeks (.60 months). Thirty-seven percent utilized a reason for leaving this placement setting as decrease in level of care and 25% had an increase in level of care.¹⁰

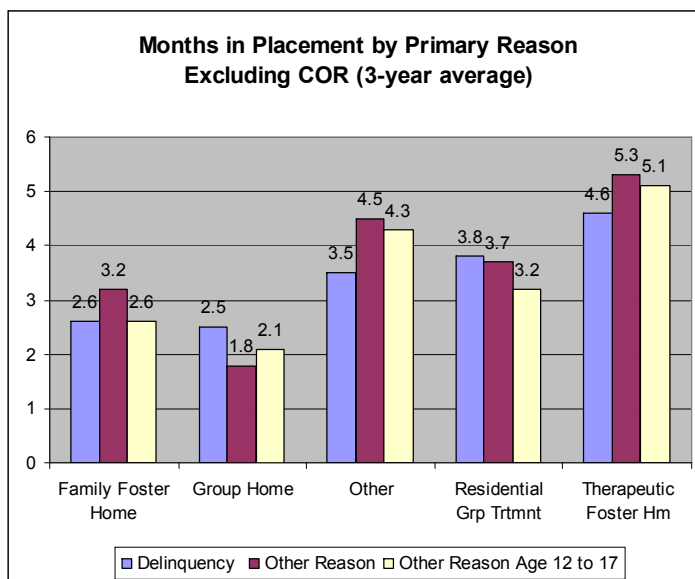
The average number of months a child is in a placement is less for those who entered care for delinquency than other reasons. Average number of months for children aged 12 to 17 entering custody for other reasons is similar to that of average number of months for delinquency.¹¹ This suggests that a child's age may be a factor in the length of time they remain in a placement.



Because children entering care for delinquency are likely to have correctional placements as a result of their charges the above data was run excluding correctional placements to assess whether the differences remained consistent. Excluding correctional placements did reduce the discrepancy, however children entering care for delinquency do still have more residential placements than the other two groups.



The average time spent in placements does not vary greatly by reason for entry into custody.



Discussion and Recommendations

The percentages of children entering custody for delinquency vary greatly across regions. The state QI committee may want to coordinate with the regional QI committees to determine why there is such a great discrepancy. The question of

whether DCFS is the most appropriate agency to meet the needs of these children is also frequently asked. To help inform this question, it may be useful to determine whether children entering for delinquency were previously victims of abuse or neglect, what resources are available in different areas, and what services have been shown to be the most efficacious for this population.

Children entering custody for delinquency are typically between ages 12 and 17 years. Children in this age group stay in care longer and have a higher number of placements, regardless of reason for entering custody. The data indicate that differences between number of placements and length of time in care appear to be more due to age than reason for placement. There are many things that may contribute to this; adoptive families frequently request younger children, older children may not wish to be adopted, and older children may prefer to work toward independent living. Training for providers on the needs of older youth and best practices for working with these children would be beneficial. The Transition to Adult Living Program Manager and the training team have recently trained caseworkers state wide on working with other youth in an effort to both improve services and knowledge.

Children entering custody for delinquency are placed more often in residential settings and less frequently in foster family homes than other teenagers. The majority of these placements are correctional placements and are short term on average (i.e., slightly more than two weeks). Time constraints did not allow for further analysis regarding the specific residential facilities utilized and their effectiveness, however this would be a useful project for the future.

¹ Definition retrieved June 22, 2008, from http://hs.utah.gov/glossary_eng_status_offense.html

² Data extracted from infomaker report r_scf_nw_reasons_detail

³ Data extracted from infomaker report r_scf_nw_reasons_detail

⁴ Data extracted from infomaker report r_scf_nw_reasons_detail

⁵ Data extracted from infomaker report r_scf_nw_reasons_age

⁶ Data extracted from infomaker report r_scf_nw_reasons_age. r_scf_nw_reasons_age_freq was used to determine the age range of 12 to 17 for delinquency. This age group is where the highest numbers of cases occur for cases entering care for delinquency.

⁷ Data extracted from infomaker report r_scf_nw_placements

⁸ Data extracted from infomaker report r_scf_nw_placements

⁹ Data extracted from infomaker report r_scf_nw_placements

¹⁰ Data extracted from infomaker report r_scf_nw_placements

¹¹ Data extracted from infomaker report r_scf_nw_placements